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PATENT

**DECORATIVE GRASS HAVING AN APPEARANCE SIMULATING
THE APPEARANCE OF CLOTH**

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Serial No. 10/238,448, filed September 9, 2002; which is a continuation of U.S. Serial No. 09/612,535, filed July 7, 2002, now U.S. Patent No. 6,511,735, issued January 28, 2003; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Serial No. 09/139,177 filed August 24, 1998, now abandoned; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Serial No. 09/098,898 filed June 17, 1998, now abandoned; which claims benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of provisional application U.S. Serial No. 60/050,867, filed June 26, 1997, now abandoned; the contents of each of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

**STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED
RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT**

[0002] Not applicable.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates to polymeric materials having an appearance simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof, and more particularly but not by way of limitation, to flower pot covers, floral wrappings,

ribbon materials and decorative grasses made from such polymeric materials. In one aspect, the present invention relates to methods for producing flower pot covers and methods of wrapping floral groupings and flower pots with a sheet of polymeric material having an appearance simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof to provide a decorative cover for such floral groupings and flower pots. In yet another aspect, the present invention relates to methods of producing decorative grasses having an appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of cloth.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof constructed in accordance with the present invention.

[0005] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof similar to the sheet of polymeric material of Fig. 1 wherein a bonding material is disposed along one edge thereof.

[0006] Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof of Fig. 2 having a floral grouping disposed thereon.

[0007] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the floral grouping of Fig. 3 being wrapped with the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof of Fig. 2 by one method of wrapping.

[0008] Fig. 5 is a perspective view of a decorative cover for the floral grouping formed from the sheet of polymeric material of Fig. 2 wherein the decorative cover formed from the sheet of polymeric material has a conical configuration.

[0009] Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a decorative cover formed from the sheet of polymeric material of Fig. 2 wherein a floral grouping is wrapped with the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof by a second method of wrapping so that the decorative cover formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof has a substantially cylindrical configuration.

[0010] Fig. 7 is a perspective view of a decorative cover positioned about a flower pot wherein the decorative cover is formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof of Fig.1.

[0011] Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional view of a flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus having the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof of Fig. 1 disposed

above an opening of the flower pot cover former and band applicator and having a flower pot disposed above the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0012] Fig. 9A is a perspective view of a sheet of expanded core polymeric film having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof wherein an acrylic heat sealable lacquer is disposed on at least one surface thereof.

[0013] Fig. 9B is a perspective view of a laminated sheet of material wherein one surface is modified or textured to provide the sheet of laminated material with a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0014] Fig. 10 is a perspective view of a preformed pot cover formed from a sheet of the polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof similar to the sheet of polymeric material of Fig. 1, a sheet of the expanded core polymeric film of Fig. 9A, or a laminated sheet of material of Fig. 9B.

[0015] Fig. 11 is a perspective view of the preformed pot cover of Fig. 10 having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0016] Fig. 12 is a diagrammatic, cross-sectional view of a male and female mold having a sheet of the expanded core polymeric film of Fig. 9A disposed therebetween for forming the preformed pot cover of Fig. 10.

[0017] Fig. 13 is a perspective view of a floral sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0018] Fig. 14 is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of Fig. 13 disposed about a floral grouping.

[0019] Fig. 15 is a perspective view of a floral sleeve having a cinching member wherein the floral sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0020] Fig. 16 is a perspective view of the floral sleeve of Fig. 15 disposed about a floral grouping.

[0021] Fig. 17 is a side view of a sleeve having a detachable portion wherein the sleeve is formed from a sheet of polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0022] Fig. 18 is a perspective view of the sleeve of Fig. 17 having a flower pot disposed therein.

[0023] Fig. 19 is a perspective view of a flower pot disposed in the sleeve of Fig. 17 wherein an upper portion of the sleeve has been removed to provide a decorative cover having a skirt.

[0024] Fig. 20A is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0025] Fig. 20B is a perspective view of a polymeric ribbon material formed of an expanded core polymeric film.

[0026] Fig. 20C is a perspective view of a laminated polymeric ribbon wherein at least one surface of the laminated polymeric ribbon is modified or textured to provide the laminated polymeric ribbon with a finish simulating the appearance of cloth.

[0027] Fig. 21 is a schematic representation of a system for making decorative grass having a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of cloth in accordance with the present invention.

[0028] Fig. 22A is a perspective view of a segment of decorative grass having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth produced from the polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

[0029] Fig. 22B is a perspective view of a segment of decorative grass having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth produced from a laminated polymeric material having a finish simulating the appearance of cloth on a surface thereof.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0030] Description of Figures 1 - 9

[0031] Referring now to Figs. 1 and 2, designated generally by the reference numeral 10 is a sheet or web of polymeric material having a texture and/or appearance simulating the texture and/or appearance of cloth (hereinafter referred to as the sheet of polymeric material 10 or the sheet of polymeric material 10 having a cloth-like appearance). That is, at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 has been modified to provide a matte or textured finish simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. The term "finish simulating the appearance of cloth" may be used interchangeably with the terms "cloth-appearing textured or matte finish", "cloth-like finish" and "cloth-like appearance".

[0032] The term "appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of cloth" as used herein will be understood to include textures and/or appearances and/or surface modifications of a polymeric material such that the polymeric material is provided with at least one surface thereof which simulates the texture or appearance of a woven material, a nonwoven material, a welded material, a spun bonded material, or a knitted or pressed fabric of fibrous material. The term "appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of cloth" as used herein will also be understood to include textures and/or appearances simulating the texture or appearance of cotton, wool, silk,

hair, burlap, and linen, as well as synthetic fibers such as rayon and polyester, and blends thereof, such as denim. While different types of cloth have been disclosed hereinabove, it will be understood that a polymeric material having at least one surface thereof modified such that the surface is provided with a texture or appearance simulating the texture or appearance of cloth of the present invention will not be limited to appearances simulating the types of cloth described herein, and the texture or appearance may simulate other types of cloth which fall within the scope of the invention.

[0033] The modification of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide the sheet of polymeric material with a matte or textured finish simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be accomplished in several ways. For example, a matte finish can be provided by printing a desired pattern on the sheet of polymeric material and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film, over the printed pattern. To further enhance the appearance or texture simulating the appearance or texture of cloth of the sheet of polymeric material 10, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish simulating the appearance of cloth can also be produced by printing a sheet of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric

material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by flocking the sheet of polymeric material, or by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the sheet of polymeric material, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material with a texture and/or appearance simulating the texture and/or appearance of cloth can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll or by laminating a second sheet of material to the sheet of polymeric material.

[0034] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth has an upper surface 14, a lower surface 16, and an outer peripheral edge 18. At least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10, such as the lower surface 16, is matted or textured as described above to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. The outer peripheral edge 18 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 comprises a first side 20, a second side 22, a third side 24, and a fourth side 26. A bonding material 27 (Fig. 2) may be disposed on at least a portion of one

or both surfaces of the sheet of polymeric material 10, such as the upper surface 14 thereof as shown and as further illustrated in U.S. Patent No. 5,181,364, entitled "WRAPPING A FLORAL GROUPING WITH SHEETS HAVING ADHESIVE OR COHESIVE MATERIAL APPLIED THERETO", issued to Weder on January 26, 1993, the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0035] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be employed to provide a decorative cover for a floral grouping (Figs. 3 through 6); or to form a decorative cover for a flower pot (Fig. 7); or to form a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot (Figs. 10 and 11); or to provide a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping (Figs. 13 through 16) or a flower pot (Figs. 17 through 19); or to provide a ribbon material having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth (Fig. 20A through 20C); or to produce decorative grass (Figs. 21 through 22B). The use of the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to form a sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to form a preformed flower pot

cover, or as a ribbon material or to produce decorative grasses will be described in more complete detail herein.

[0036] As noted above, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be utilized to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The term "flower pot" as used herein refers to any type of container for holding a floral grouping, or a plant, or even another pot-type container. Examples of flower pots and/or pot-type containers include, but are not limited to, clay pots, wooden pots, plastic pots, pots made from natural and/or synthetic fibers, or any combination thereof. Such flower pots and/or pot-type containers are provided with a retaining space for receiving a floral grouping. The floral grouping may be disposed within the retaining space of the flower pot with a suitable growing medium described in further detail below, or other retaining medium, such as a floral foam. It will also be understood that in some cases the floral grouping, and any appropriate growing medium or other retaining medium, may be disposed in a sleeve formed from the sheet of polymeric material 10 if the sleeve is adapted to contain a medium.

[0037] "Floral grouping" as used herein means cut fresh flowers, artificial flowers, a single flower or other fresh and/or artificial plants or other floral materials and may include other secondary plants and/or ornamentation or artificial or natural materials which add to the aesthetics of the overall floral

grouping. Further, the floral grouping may comprise a growing potted plant having a root portion as well. However, it will be appreciated that the floral grouping may consist of only a single bloom or only foliage, or a botanical item (not shown), or a propagule. The term "floral grouping" may be used interchangeably herein with the term "floral arrangement". The term "floral grouping" may also be used interchangeably herein with the terms "botanical item" and/or "propagule."

[0038] The term "growing medium" when used herein means any liquid, solid or gaseous material used for plant growth or for the cultivation of propagules, including organic and inorganic materials such as soil, humus, perlite, vermiculite, sand, water, and including the nutrients, fertilizers or hormones or combinations thereof required by the plants or propagules for growth.

[0039] The term "botanical item" when used herein means a natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plant, taken singularly or in combination. The term "botanical item" also means any portion or portions of natural or artificial herbaceous or woody plants including stems, leaves, flowers, blossoms, buds, blooms, cones, or roots, taken singularly or in combination, or in groupings of such portions such as bouquets or floral groupings.

[0040] The term "propagule" when used herein means any structure capable of being propagated or acting as an agent of reproduction including seeds, shoots, stems, runners, tubers, plants, leaves, roots or spores.

[0041] In the embodiments shown in the drawings, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth is square. It will be appreciated, however, that the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be of any shape, configuration or size as long as the sheet of polymeric material 10 is sufficiently sized and shaped to wrap and encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. For example, the sheet of polymeric material 10 may have a rectangular, round, oval, octagonal or asymmetrical shape. Further, multiple sheets of the polymeric material 10 may be used in a single circumstance to provide a decorative cover or sleeve for a floral grouping or a flower pot. Moreover, when multiple sheets of the polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth are used in combination, the sheets of polymeric material 10 need not be uniform in size or shape. Finally, it will be appreciated that the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth shown herein is a substantially flat sheet except for the texturing, matting, embossing, flocking, application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink, or other treatments

and techniques employed to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with the desired texture or matting so that the sheet of polymeric material 10 has the appearance of cloth.

[0042] Any thickness or stiffness of the sheet of polymeric material 10 may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 can be modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth and the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be wrapped about at least a portion of a floral grouping or a flower pot, as described herein. Generally, the sheet of polymeric material 10 will have a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably a thickness in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil.

[0043] The terms "polymer film", "polymeric film" and "polymeric material" when used herein means a synthetic polymer such as a polypropylene or a polyethylene, a naturally occurring polymer such as cellophane, an extruded polymeric material having an expanded core such as extruded polypropylene having an expanded core and combinations thereof. The extruded polymeric material having an expanded core may also be referred to herein as an expanded core polymeric material.

[0044] "Extruded polymeric material having an expanded core" or "expanded core polymeric film" as used herein means any extrudable polymeric material or polymeric film in which the core is expanded during extrusion, such as by incorporation of a blowing agent in the polymeric resin which is being extruded.

[0045] The sheet of polymeric material 10 may also be constructed, in whole or in part, from a cling material. "Cling material" when used herein means any material which is capable of connecting to the sheet of material and/or itself upon contacting engagement during the wrapping process and is wrappable about an item whereby portions of the cling material contactingly engage and connect to other portions of another material, or, alternatively, itself, for generally securing the material wrapped about at least a portion of a flower pot. This connecting engagement is preferably temporary in that the material may be easily removed, i.e., the cling material "clings" to the flower pot.

[0046] The cling material is constructed, and treated if necessary, from polyethylene such as Cling Wrap made by Glad®, First Brands Corporation, Danbury, Connecticut. The thickness of the cling material will, in part, depend upon the size of sleeve and the size of the flower pot in the sleeve, i.e., generally, a larger flower pot may require a thicker and therefore stronger cling material. The cling material will range in thickness from about 0.1 mil to about

10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.5 mil to about 2.5 mil. However, any thickness of cling material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention which permits the cling material to be modified as hereinbefore described to provide the cling material with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0047] A decorative cover for a floral grouping (Figs. 3 through 6), or a decorative cover for a flower pot (Fig. 7), or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot (Figs. 10 and 11), or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping (Figs. 13 through 16) or a flower pot (Figs. 17 through 19), or a ribbon material having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth (Fig. 20A through 20C), or decorative grass (Figs. 21 through 22B) may also be constructed of a laminated material (Fig. 9B). The laminated material having at least one surface thereof modified to provide the laminated material with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) to paper, metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to assimilate the weave or texture of cloth. The

only requirements in using a laminated material having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or as ribbon material or decorative grass in accordance with the present invention is that at least one surface of the laminated material be capable of being modified to provide the laminated material with at least one surface having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth and that the laminated material be sufficiently flexible or pliable to permit the laminated material to be formed into a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot, or to be used as ribbon material or decorative grass. It should also be noted that two or more separate sheets of material can be used to form a decorative cover for a floral grouping, or a decorative cover for a flower pot, or a preformed flower pot cover for covering a flower pot, or a sleeve for wrapping or covering a floral grouping or a flower pot as long as one of the sheets of material is modified or textured to provide same with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0048] The sheet of polymeric material 10 or a laminated material (Fig. 9B) having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may vary in color. Further, the sheet of polymeric material 10 or a laminated material may comprise other decorative patterns or designs in addition to the matting, texturing, flocking, application of foamable lacquers or foamable inks, or embossing employed to impart the appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth to the sheet of polymeric material 10 or the laminated material.

[0049] As illustrated in Fig. 3, the sheet of polymeric material 10 has a width 30 extending generally between the first side 20 and the second side 22, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material 10 can be wrapped about and encompass a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sheet of polymeric material 10 has a length 32 extending generally between the third side 24 and the fourth side 26, respectively, sufficiently sized whereby the sheet of polymeric material 10 extends over a substantial portion of the floral grouping when the sheet of polymeric material 10 has been wrapped about the floral grouping in accordance with the present invention, as described in detail herein. The sheet of polymeric material 10 may also be wrapped about a flower pot to substantially wrap and cover the flower pot in accordance with the present invention.

[0050] A plurality of sheets of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be connected together to form a roll as is shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,459,976, issued to Weder et al. on October 24, 1995, entitled "MATERIAL AND ADHESIVE STRIP DISPENSER", the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated in its entirety herein by reference.

[0051] Figs. 3-5 illustrate the use of the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth in wrapping a floral grouping 34 to provide a decorative cover 36 (Fig. 5) for the floral grouping 34, wherein the decorative cover 36 has an open upper end 38 and a lower end 40. The sheet of polymeric material 10 may optionally have the strip of bonding material 27 disposed upon the upper surface 14, the lower surface 16 or both, such as the strip of bonding material 27 disposed along at least a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 so as to be disposed substantially adjacent the fourth side 26 thereof substantially as shown in Figs. 3 and 4. Further, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be provided either as an individual sheet or from a pad or roll of material.

[0052] The bonding material 27, if present, may have a backing or release strip (not shown). The backing or release strip may be left applied for a period

of time to the bonding material 27 after it is disposed on a surface of the sheet of polymeric material 10 prior to its use as a wrapping material to protect the bonding qualities of the bonding strip.

[0053] In operation, an operator may dispose the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth on a support surface (not shown) such that the lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth) is in contact with the support surface.

[0054] Referring more specifically to Figs. 3-5, the floral grouping 34 is placed upon the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in a diagonal orientation. The floral grouping 34 has an upper bloom or foliage portion 42 and a lower stem portion 44. The sheet of polymeric material 10 is then wrapped about the floral grouping 34 by the operator (Figs. 4 and 5), the operator overlapping a portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 over another portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10. That is, for example, the operator places the first side 20 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 over the floral grouping 34, as shown in Fig. 4. The operator continues to roll the floral grouping 34 and the sheet of polymeric material 10 in the direction toward the second side 22 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 until the upper surface 14

near second side 22 firmly engages the lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10, wherein the floral grouping 34 is substantially encompassed by the sheet of polymeric material 10, and wherein the bonding material 27 contacts the sheet of polymeric material 10 to provide the decorative cover 36 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth which substantially encompasses and surrounds a substantial portion of the floral grouping 34. Fig. 5 shows the floral grouping 34 wrapped in a conical fashion to provide the decorative cover 36 for the floral grouping 34 which has the appearance of being made of a cloth material. When the floral grouping 34 is wrapped in a conical fashion, the bloom portion 42 of the floral grouping 34 is exposed near the open upper end 38 of the decorative cover 36, and the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 is exposed near the lower end 40 of the decorative cover 36.

[0055] In another embodiment, illustrated in Fig. 6, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having at least one surface thereof modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth is utilized to wrap the floral grouping 34 in a cylindrical fashion. The floral grouping 34 is disposed upon the sheet of polymeric material 10 approximately parallel to the third side 24 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. The sheet of polymeric material 10 is wrapped generally about the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 to a position

wherein the third side 24 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 generally overlaps the fourth side 26 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in a cylindrical fashion. It should be noted that the sheet of polymeric material 10 may be wrapped a plurality of times about the stem portion 44 of the floral grouping 34 before the overlapping of the third side 24 and the fourth side 26 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. As before, the portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 near the third side 24 is disposed generally adjacent another portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 and the two adjacent portions then are brought into contact where they may be bondingly engaged, thereby securing the sheet of polymeric material 10 generally about the floral grouping 34 so as to provide a decorative cover 36a for the floral grouping 34 which has the appearance of being fabricated of cloth.

[0056] In another version of the invention, the sheet of polymeric material 10 having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be used to wrap a flower pot or pot-type container, as noted above. Shown in Fig.7 is a flower pot designated by the reference numeral 50 having an open upper end 52, a bottom end 54, an outer peripheral surface 56, and an inner retaining space 58 within which may be disposed a growing medium. The flower pot 50 may contain a botanical

item, such as a plant 60, which has an upper portion 62 comprising blooms or foliage or both.

[0057] The sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be wrapped about the flower pot 50 by any one of numerous methods used to wrap sheets of material about flower pots to form decorative pot covers for flower pots, such as a decorative cover 61 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth disposed about the flower pot 50 illustrated in Fig. 7. The sheet of polymeric material 10 may, for example, be formed by hand about the outer peripheral surface 56 of the flower pot 50 to produce the decorative cover 61 which has the appearance of being fabricated of cloth. The decorative cover 61 can then be secured about the flower pot 50 by a bonding material or by an elastic band 64 such that the open upper end 52 of the flower pot 50 remains substantially uncovered by the decorative cover 61 substantially as shown in Fig. 7.

[0058] Referring now to Fig. 8, a flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus 66 for forming the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth into the decorative cover 61 for the flower pot 50 of Fig. 7 is illustrated. The flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus 66 comprises a band applicator 68 and a flower pot cover former 70. The flower pot cover former

and band applicator apparatus 66 has a support platform 72 with an opening 74 formed therein. A band, such as elastic band 64, is disposed circumferentially about the opening 74 in the support platform 72.

[0059] The lower surface 16 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 (which has been modified to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with a textured or matted surface simulating cloth) is positioned on an upper surface 76 on the support platform 72 such that the sheet of polymeric material 10 is positioned over the opening 74 in the support platform 72. The flower pot 50 is positioned above the sheet of polymeric material 10 and is moved in a direction 78 into the opening 74 of the flower pot cover former and band applicator apparatus 66. As the flower pot 50 is moved into the opening 74, the sheet of polymeric material 10 is pressed about the outer peripheral surface 56 of the flower pot 50 thereby forming the decorative cover 61 about the flower pot 50. The decorative cover 61 (which has an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth) is then secured about the flower pot 50 by the elastic band 64. The flower pot 50 having the decorative cover 61 secured thereto is then moved in a direction 80 out of the opening 74 in the support platform 72.

[0060] The elastic band 64 can be applied manually or automatically such as by the method shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,105,599, entitled "MEANS FOR SECURING A DECORATIVE COVER ABOUT A FLOWER POT", issued to Weder on

April 21, 1992, which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The band 64 can also be applied as a tie using a method such as described in "Single Station Covering and Fastening System", U.S. Patent No. 5,609,009, issued to Weder et al on March 11, 1997, the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. The sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can also be applied automatically about the flower pot 50, for example, by methods shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,733,521, entitled "COVER FORMING APPARATUS", issued to Weder et al. on March 29, 1988, and U.S. Patent No. 5,291,721, entitled "COVER FORMING APPARATUS HAVING PIVOTING FORMING MEMBERS", issued to Weder et al. on March 8, 1994, both of which are hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0061] Instead of securing the decorative cover 61 about the flower pot 50 via the band 64, the decorative cover 61 formed from the sheet of polymeric material 10 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be secured to the flower pot 50 by the use of one or more bonding materials. For example, the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 may have a bonding material such as the bonding material 27 disposed upon a portion thereof. When the sheet of polymeric material 10 is disposed about the flower pot 50, at least a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 contacts the outer peripheral

surface 56 of the flower pot 50 and is thereby bonded and held about the flower pot 50 via the bonding material.

[0062] The bonding material may cover a portion of the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10, or the bonding material may entirely cover the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10. The bonding material may be disposed on the upper surface 14 of the sheet of polymeric material 10 in the form of a strip or in the form of spaced-apart spots. One method for disposing a bonding material on the sheet of polymeric material 10 is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,111,637, entitled "Method For Wrapping A Floral Grouping", issued to Weder, et al. on May 12, 1992, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0063] The term "bonding material" when used herein can mean an adhesive, frequently a pressure sensitive adhesive, or a cohesive or any adhesive/cohesive combination having adhesive qualities (i.e., qualities of adhesion or adhesion/cohesion, respectively) sufficient to cause the attachment of a portion of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to itself, to a floral grouping 34, or to a flower pot 50. Since the bonding material may comprise either an adhesive or an adhesive/cohesive combination, it will be appreciated that both adhesives and cohesives are known in the art, and both are commercially available. When the bonding material is a cohesive, a similar cohesive material must be placed on the adjacent surface for bondingly contacting and bondingly

engaging with the cohesive material. The term "bonding material also includes materials which are heat sealable and, in this instance, the adjacent portions of the material must be brought into contact and then heat must be applied to effect the seal. The term "bonding material also includes materials which are sonically sealable and vibratory sealable. The term "bonding material when used herein also means a heat sealing lacquer or hot melt material which may be applied to the material and, in this instance, heat, sound waves, or vibrations, also must be applied to effect the sealing.

[0064] The term "bonding material when used herein also means any type of material or thing which can be used to effect the bonding or connecting of the two adjacent portions of the sheet of polymeric material 10 to effect the connection or bonding described herein. The term "bonding material" may also include ties, labels, bands, ribbons, strings, tapes (including single or double-sided adhesive tapes), staples or combinations thereof. Some of the bonding materials would secure the ends of the material while other bonding materials may bind the circumference of a cover, or a sleeve, or, alternatively and/or in addition, the bonding materials would secure overlapping folds in the material and/or sleeve. Another way to secure the cover and/or sleeve is to heat seal the ends of the material to another portion of the material. One way to do this is to contact the ends with an iron of sufficient heat to heat seal the material.

[0065] Alternatively, a cold seal adhesive may be utilized as the bonding material. The cold seal adhesive adheres only to a similar substrate, acting similarly as a cohesive, and binds only to itself. The cold seal adhesive, since it bonds only to a similar substrate, does not cause a residue to build up on equipment, thereby both permitting much more rapid disposition and use of such equipment to form articles and reducing labor costs. Further, since no heat is required to effect the seal, the dwell time, that is, the time for the sheet of material to form and retain the shape of an article, such as a flower pot cover or flower pot, is reduced. A cold seal adhesive binds quickly and easily with minimal pressure, and such a seal is not readily releasable. This characteristic is different from, for example, a pressure sensitive adhesive.

[0066] The term "bonding material" when used herein also means any heat or chemically shrinkable material, and static electrical or other electrical materials, chemical welding materials, magnetic materials, mechanical or barb-type fastening materials or clamps, curl-type characteristics of the film or materials incorporated in material which can cause the material to take on certain shapes, cling films, slots, grooves, shrinkable materials and bands, curl materials, springs, and any type of welding method which may weld portions of the material to itself or to the pot, or to both the material itself and the pot.

[0067]

Description of Figs. 9 - 12

[0068] Referring now to Figs. 9 through 11, a decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 illustrated in Figs. 10-11 is constructed from a sheet of flexible material 112 having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the sheet of flexible material 112 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth (Fig. 9A) or a laminated sheet of flexible material 112a having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the laminated sheet of flexible material 112a with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth (Fig. 9B). In the embodiment shown in Fig. 9A, the sheet of flexible material 112 used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 comprises a sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 having an upper surface 116, a lower surface 118 and a thickness in the range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, more desirably in the range of from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and a coating of an acrylic heat sealable lacquer 120 disposed on at least one of the upper and lower surfaces 116 and 118, respectively, of the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114. It should be understood, however, that the sheet of flexible material 112 is not limited to being the expanded core polymeric film 114 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth; rather, the sheet of flexible material 112 can be any flexible polymeric material (such as the sheet of polymeric material 10 herein before described) or flexible

laminated material (such as will be described herein after with reference to Fig. 9B) which can be modified or textured so that at least one surface of such polymeric material or laminated material is provided with a finish or texture simulating cloth.

[0069] As previously stated, the modification of at least one surface of the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 to provide the sheet of flexible material 112 with the desired matte or textured finish can be accomplished by printing a desired pattern on the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 and thereafter laminating a matte material, such as a translucent polymeric film, over the printed pattern. To further enhance the appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth, the matte material may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. A matte or textured finish simulating the appearance of cloth can also be produced by printing a sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by embossing and printing the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry, or wherein a portion of the

embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll to produce the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114 or by laminating a second sheet of material to the sheet of expanded core polymeric film 114.

[0070] When the sheet of flexible material 112 is formed into the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110, a plurality of overlapping folds 122 are formed and at least a portion of the overlapping folds 122 are connected to adjacently disposed portions of the preformed flower pot cover 110 via the acrylic heat sealable lacquer 120.

[0071] As shown in Figs. 10 and 11, the decorative preformed pot cover 110 has an upper end 125, a lower end 126, and an outer peripheral surface 128. An opening 130 intersects the upper end 125, forming an inner peripheral surface 132 which defines and encompasses a retaining space 133 within which a flower pot 134 containing a floral grouping 136 may be disposed in a manner well known in the art.

[0072] In another embodiment, a sheet of flexible laminated material 112a (Fig. 9B) is used in the construction of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110. The sheet of flexible laminated material 112a comprises a first

sheet of material 114a having an upper surface 116a and a lower surface 118a, and a second sheet of material 120a. At least one surface of the first sheet of material 114a or the second sheet of material 120a is modified to provide the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a with the desired appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. The sheet of flexible laminated material 112a having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of paper, metallized foil, polymeric film, or combinations or laminates thereof, such as a paper/polymeric film laminate, wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to assimilate the weave or texture of cloth. It should be understood, however, that the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 can also be formed from a laminated sheet of flexible material 112a wherein the first sheet of material 114a is an expanded core polymeric film and the second sheet of material 120a is a polymeric film, paper or metallized foil and neither of the first and second sheets of material 114a and 120a, respectively, is modified to provide the laminated sheet of flexible

material 112a with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0073] The first sheet of material 114a desirably has a thickness in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and the second sheet of material 120 desirably has a thickness in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The second sheet or material 120a is desirably laminated to the first sheet of material 114a with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the laminated sheet of flexible material 112a. While the thickness of the sheet of flexible material 112a can vary widely and will generally depend on the thickness of the first sheet of material 114a and the thickness of the second sheet of material 120a, desirable results can be obtained where the sheet of flexible material 112a has a thickness in the range of from about 1 mil to about 20 mil, and more desirably from about 1.2 mil to about 2.5 mil.

[0074] As previously stated, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 may be constructed from the sheet of polymeric material 10 (Fig.1), or the sheet of flexible material 112 (Fig. 9A), or the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a (Fig. 9B). The preformed flower pot cover 110 so formed will have a plurality of overlapping folds 122 formed therein, at least a portion thereof being connected. If desired, the decorative preformed flower pot cover

110 can be formed of a plurality of sheets of the same and/or different types of material. The method and apparatus employed to form the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 is substantially identical whether one uses one or more sheets of the polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), one or more sheets of the flexible material 112 (Fig. 9A), or one or more sheets of the flexible laminated material 112a (Fig. 9B) or a combination of such sheets of material. Thus, only the formation of the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 using a sheet of the flexible material 112 of Fig. 9A will be described in detail hereinafter.

[0075] The decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 may be formed using a conventional mold system 140 comprising a male mold 142 and a female mold 144 having a mold cavity 146 for matingly receiving the male mold 142 (Fig. 12). The sheet of flexible material 112 is positioned between the male and female molds 142 and 144, respectively. Movement of the male mold 142 in the direction 148 and into the mold cavity 146 forces the sheet of flexible material 112 to be disposed about the portion of the male mold 142 disposed in the mold cavity 146 of the female mold 146 and thereby forms the sheet of material 112 into the preformed decorative flower pot cover 110 (Figs. 10 and 11). Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative preformed flower pot cover 110 constructed from the materials described herein above, may have a bonding material disposed upon a portion thereof.

[0076] Methods for forming such preformed decorative pot covers are well known in the art. Two methods of forming such covers are described in U.S. Patent No. 4,773,182, entitled "ARTICLE FORMING SYSTEM", issued to Weder et al. on September 27, 1988, and U.S. Patent No. 5,291,721, entitled "COVER FORMING APPARATUS HAVING PIVOTING FORMING MEMBERS", issued to Weder et al. on March 8, 1994, each of which is expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0077] Description of Figs. 13 - 19

[0078] Shown in Fig. 13 is a decorative cover designated therein by the general reference numeral 160 which comprises a flexible bag or sleeve 162 of unitary construction having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve 162 may be used as a decorative cover 160 for a floral grouping or a flower pot. The sleeve 162 initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of material which is openable in the form of a tube or sleeve. Such sleeves are well known in the floral industry. Further, in accordance with the present invention, the decorative cover 160 can be constructed of the polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), the flexible material 112 (Fig. 9A), or the flexible laminated material 112a (Fig. 9B), whereby at least a portion of one surface, preferably an outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162, has been modified to provide the sleeve 162 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance

and/or texture of cloth as previously described herein. The sleeve 162 has an upper end 166, a lower end 168 and the outer peripheral surface 164. The sleeve 162 may be tapered outwardly from the lower end 168 toward a larger diameter at its upper end 166. In its flattened state the sleeve 162 generally has an overall trapezoidal or modified trapezoidal shape, and when opened is substantially frusto-conical to coniform. It will be appreciated, however, that the sleeve 162 may comprise variations on the aforementioned shapes or may comprise significantly altered shapes such as square or rectangular, wherein the sleeve 162 when opened has a cylindrical form, as long as the sleeve 162 functions in accordance with the present invention in the manner described herein. The sleeve 162 (or any other sleeve disclosed herein) may have an angular or contoured shape.

[0079] The sleeve 162 has an opening 170 at the upper end 166 and may be open at the lower end 168, or closed with a bottom at the lower end 168. The sleeve 162 also has an inner peripheral surface 172 which, when the sleeve 162 is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space 174. When the lower end 168 of the sleeve 162 has a closed lower end 168, a portion of the lower end 168 may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for allowing the lower portion of the inner retaining space 174 to be expandable, for example, for receiving the circular bottom of a pot or growing medium.

[0080] The sleeve 162 is generally frusto-conically shaped, but the sleeve 162 may be, by way of example but not by way of limitation, cylindrical, frusto-conical, a combination of both frusto-conical and cylindrical, or any other shape, as long as the sleeve 162 functions as described herein as noted above. Further, the sleeve 162 may comprise any shape, whether geometric, non-geometric, asymmetrical and/or fanciful as long as it functions in accordance with the present invention. The sleeve 162 may also be equipped with drain holes (if having a closed bottom) or side ventilation holes (not shown), or can be made from gas permeable or impermeable materials.

[0081] The material from which the sleeve 162 is constructed is the same as previously described above for the sheet of polymeric material 10 having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth, or the sheet of flexible material 112 or 112a. Any thickness of material may be utilized in accordance with the present invention as long as the sleeve 162 may be formed as described herein, is provided with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth, and as long as the formed sleeve 162 may contain at least a portion of a flower pot or a floral grouping, as described herein. Additionally, an insulating material such as bubble film, preferable as one of two or more layers, can be

utilized in order to provide additional protection for the item, such as a floral grouping, contained therein.

[0082] In Fig. 14 the sleeve 162 is illustrated having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth provided on the outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162. A floral grouping 176 is disposed within the inner retaining space 174 of the sleeve 162. Generally, an upper or bloom portion 178 of the floral grouping 176 is exposed near the opening 170 of the sleeve 162 and a lower or stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 is exposed near the lower end 168 of the sleeve 162. Either end of the sleeve 162 may be closed about the floral grouping 176. Generally, a portion of the sleeve 162 is tightened about a portion of the stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 for holding the decorative cover 160 about the floral grouping 176. For example, the sleeve 162 may be held by a tie 182 tied about the sleeve 162 such as is shown in Fig. 14. Other methods for binding the sleeve 162 may be employed such as the bonding methods and materials described elsewhere herein. For example, as shown in Fig. 15, a decorative cover 160a is shown which comprises a sleeve 162a having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth and a cinching tab 184 having a bonding material 186 disposed upon a surface thereof. The cinching tab 184 can be used to gather portions of the sleeve 162a together about the

stem portion 180 of the floral grouping 176 as shown in Fig. 16 for holding the sleeve 162a tightly about the floral grouping 176.

[0083] Similarly, it may generally be desired to use the sleeve 162 as a decorative cover for a flower pot (not shown). The flower pot will generally contain a botanical item or plant. The flower pot can be deposited into the open sleeve 162 in a manner well known in the art, such as manually wherein the sleeve 162 is opened by hand and the flower pot deposited therein.

[0084] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on a portion of the sleeve 162 or any sleeve described herein to assist in holding the sleeve 162 to the flower pot when the flower pot is disposed within the sleeve 162 or to assist in closing the upper end 166 of the sleeve 162 or adhering the sleeve 162 to the flower pot after the flower pot has been disposed therein, as will be discussed in further detail below.

[0085] It will be understood that the bonding material, if present, may be disposed as a strip or block on a surface of the sleeve 162. The bonding material may also be disposed upon either the outer peripheral surface 164 or the inner peripheral surface 172 of the sleeve 162, as well as upon the flower pot. Further, the bonding material may be disposed as spots of bonding material, or in any other geometric, non-geometric, asymmetric, or fanciful form, and in any pattern, including covering either the entire inner peripheral surface 172 and/or outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162 and/or the

flower pot. The bonding material may be covered by a cover or release strip which can be removed prior to the use of the sleeve 162 or flower pot. The bonding material can be applied by methods known to those of ordinary skill in their art. One method for disposing a bonding material, in this case an adhesive, is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,111,637, entitled "METHOD FOR WRAPPING A FLORAL GROUPING", issued to Weder et al. on May 12, 1993, the specification of which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0086] As noted above, a bonding material may be disposed on at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface 172 of the sleeve 162 (or any other sleeve described herein), or, alternatively, the bonding material may be disposed on the outer peripheral surface of a flower pot contained within the sleeve 162, while the sleeve 162 may be free of the bonding material. In a further alternative, the bonding material may be disposed both on at least a portion of the flower pot as well as upon at least a portion of the inner peripheral surface 172 of the sleeve 162. In addition, a portion of the bonding material may also be disposed on the outer peripheral surface 164 of the sleeve 162 as well. It will be understood that the bonding material may be disposed in a solid section of bonding material. The bonding material, when present, is disposed on the sleeve 162 and/or flower pot by any method known in the art.

[0087] Certain versions of sleeves described herein may be used in combination with a preformed pot cover. For example, a preformed pot cover

may be applied to the pot, then the covered pot wrapped or disposed within a sleeve. Either the cover or the sleeve, or both, may have an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. Examples of sleeves which may be used in this invention are shown in the specification of U.S. Patent No. 5,625,979, entitled "SLEEVE HAVING A DETACHABLE PORTION FORMING A SKIRT AND METHODS", issued to Weder on May 6, 1997, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Equipment and devices for forming sleeves are commercially available, and well known in the art.

[0088] Shown in Figs. 17 and 18 is another embodiment of a decorative cover 160b comprising a sleeve having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth constructed from the polymeric material 10 having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the sheet of polymeric material 10 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth, or the flexible material 112 or 112a in accordance with the present invention and designated by the general reference numeral 162b. The sleeve 162b has a "detaching" element in predetermined areas for detaching a portion of the sleeve 162b. The sleeve 162b generally initially comprises a flexible flat collapsed piece of material which is openable in the form of a tube or sleeve. The sleeve 162b is constructed of the same material and in the same way as described previously

herein and may be described exactly the same as the other sleeves described herein except for the additional elements described hereinafter.

[0089] The sleeve 162b has an upper end 166b, a lower end 168b, and an outer peripheral surface 164b. The sleeve 162b has an opening 170b at the upper end 166b thereof, and the sleeve 162b may be open at the lower end 168b or closed with a bottom at the lower end 168b. In a flattened state, the sleeve 162b has a first side 171 and a second side 173. The sleeve 162b also has an inner peripheral surface 172b which, when the sleeve 162b is opened, defines and encompasses an inner retaining space 174b as shown in Fig. 18. When the lower end 168b of the sleeve 162b has a closed bottom, a portion of the lower end 168b may be inwardly folded to form one or more gussets (not shown) for permitting a circular bottom of an object such as a potted plant 176b to be disposed in the inner retaining space 174b of the lower end 168b of the sleeve 162b.

[0090] As shown in Figs. 17 and 18, the sleeve 162b is demarcated into an upper portion 188 and a lower portion 190. The lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b is generally sized to contain the flower pot 176b. The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is sized to substantially surround and encompass a plant 192 contained in the flower pot 176b disposed within the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. The sleeve 162b is demarcated into the upper portion 188 and the lower portion 190 by a detaching element 194 for enabling the detachment

of the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. In the present version, the detaching element 194 is a plurality of generally laterally-oriented or alternating diagonally-oriented perforations which extend circumferentially across the outer peripheral surface 164b of the sleeve 162b from the first side 171 to the second side 173.

[0091] In the embodiment shown in Figs. 17 and 18, the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b further comprises a base portion 196 and a skirt portion 198. The base portion 196 comprises that part of the lower portion 190 which, when the flower pot 176b is placed into the lower portion 190, has an inner peripheral surface 172b which is substantially adjacent to and surrounds an outer peripheral surface 199 of the flower pot 176b. The skirt portion 198 comprises that part of the lower portion 190 which extends beyond an open upper end 201 of the flower pot 176b and adjacent at least a portion of the plant 192 contained within the flower pot 176b and which is left to freely extend at an angle, inwardly or outwardly, from the base portion 196 when the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is detached from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b by actuation of the detaching element 194.

[0092] In the intact sleeve 162b, the skirt portion 198 comprises an upper peripheral edge congruent with the detaching element 194 which is connected to a lower peripheral edge, also congruent with the detaching element 194, of the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b. In Figs. 17 and 18, the upper

peripheral edge of the skirt portion 198 is congruent with a series of alternating diagonally-oriented lines of perforations which together form a zig-zag and comprise the detaching element 194. The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b may also have an additional detaching element 200 indicated as a plurality of vertical perforations for facilitating removal of the upper portion 188 and which are disposed more or less vertically therein extending between the detaching element 194 of the sleeve 162b and the upper end 166b.

[0093] The upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b is thereby separable from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b by tearing the upper portion 188 along both the detaching element 200 and the detaching element 194, thereby separating the upper portion 188 from the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b. The lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b remains disposed as the base portion 196 about the flower pot 176b and as the skirt portion 198 about the plant 192 forming a decorative cover 202 as shown in Fig. 19 which substantially surrounds and encompasses the flower pot 176b and the plant 192 contained therein. An outer peripheral surface 164b of the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, for example, the base and skirt portions 196 and 198, may be modified to provide the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth, while the upper portion 188 is left unmodified or is printed with a design. When the upper portion 188 is detached, the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b

remains about the flower pot 176b and thereby forms a decorative cover 202 about the flower pot 176b which has the appearance of a decorative cloth cover.

[0094] "Detaching element" as used herein, means any element, or combination of elements, or features, such as, but not by way of limitation, perforations, tear strips, zippers, and any other devices or elements of this nature known in the art, or any combination thereof. Therefore, while perforations are shown and described in detail herein, it will be understood that tear strips, zippers, or any other "detaching elements" known in the art, or any combination thereof, could be substituted therefor and/or used therewith.

[0095] In a general method of use of sleeve 162b as a decorative cover for a flower pot, an operator provides a sleeve 162b, and the flower pot 176b having a plant 192 disposed in a growing medium contained within the flower pot 176b. The operator then disposes the flower pot 176b having the plant 192 contained therein into the sleeve 162b by opening the sleeve 162b at its upper end 166b and assuring both that the opening 170b therein is in an open condition, and that the inner peripheral surface 172b of the sleeve 162b is somewhat expanded outward as well, as shown in Fig. 18. The operator then manually or automatically disposes the flower pot 176b into the opening 170b in the sleeve 162b, the flower pot 176b being disposed generally through the upper portion 188 of the sleeve 162b into generally the lower portion 190 of the

sleeve 162b, the flower pot 176b remaining in the lower portion 190 of the sleeve 162b, permitting the sleeve 162b to substantially surround and tightly encompass the flower pot 176b. It will be understood that alternatively, the sleeve 162b may be provided with an extension (not shown) and the sleeve 162b may be disposed on rods or wickets, and the flower pot 176b may be disposed in the sleeve 162b either before or after the sleeve 162b has been removed from the wickets.

[0096] Embodiments of Figs. 20A - 20C

[0097] Referring now to Fig. 20A, designated generally by the reference numeral 210 is a polymeric ribbon material having at least one surface thereof modified so as to provide the polymeric ribbon 210 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. That is, at least one surface of a web of polymeric material (not shown) is modified to provide a matte or textured finish 212 simulating the appearance of cloth. The modification of the web of polymeric material (not shown) to provide the polymeric ribbon material 210 with a matte or textured finish 212 can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material 210 having the matte or textured finish 212 can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the sheet of polymeric

material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the sheet of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by flocking the sheet of polymeric material, or by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the sheet of polymeric material, or by embossing and printing the sheet of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish 212 capable of providing the sheet of polymeric material 210 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll. Thereafter, the web of material having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric ribbon material 210 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0098] Any polymeric material capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric material with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material 210. For example, the polymeric material employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material 210 can be the

polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), i.e. a polypropylene film having a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or the sheet of flexible material 112, i.e., an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil.

[0099] Referring now to Fig. 20B, designated generally by the reference numeral 220 is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material 220 is a laminated material comprising a first web or sheet of material 222 having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil, and a second web or sheet of material 224 having a thickness in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, and more desirably from about 0.6 mil to about 1.25 mil. The laminated material having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be produced by laminating two or more sheets of polymeric film (such as two or more sheets of polypropylene film or a sheet of polypropylene film and a sheet of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film) with a sheet of paper, metallized foil and the like wherein at least one surface of the laminated material is textured or modified to assimilate the weave or texture of cloth. The second web or sheet of

material 224 is desirably laminated to the first web or sheet of material 222 with a colored adhesive so as to impart a desired color to the polymeric ribbon material 220. If desired the polymeric ribbon material 220 may be treated or otherwise processed to provide the polymeric ribbon material 220 with a matte or textured finish 226 simulating the weave or knit of cloth so that the polymeric ribbon material 220 has a cloth like appearance similar to the polymeric ribbon material 210 hereinbefore described with reference to Fig. 20A. That is, a matte or textured finish 226 simulating cloth can be printed on the first web or sheet of material 222, and thereafter the second web or sheet of material 224 (which in this case is desirably a matte material of translucent polymeric film) is laminated to the first web or sheet of material 222 to provide the polymeric ribbon material 220 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. To further enhance the appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth of the polymeric ribbon material 220, the second web or sheet of material 224 may or may not have a plurality of spatially disposed holes extending therethrough. The matte or textured finish 226 can be produced by printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking at least one of the first and second

webs or sheets of material 222 and 224, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224, by embossing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by embossing and printing at least one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish 226 capable of providing the polymeric ribbon material 220 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be achieved by extruding the resin used to produce one of the first and second webs or sheets of material 222 and 224 onto a matted or textured chill roll.

[0100] Referring now to Fig. 20C, designated generally by the reference numeral 230 is another embodiment of a polymeric ribbon material for forming decorative bows and for wrapping items. The polymeric ribbon material 230 comprises a polymeric film 232 having an upper surface 234, a lower surface 236 and a thickness in the range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably, from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil. An acrylic heat sealable lacquer 238 is applied to at least one of the upper and lower surfaces 234 and

236 of the polymeric film 232, such as the lower surface 236 of the polymeric film 232 and the upper surface 234 of the polymeric film 232 are desirably modified to provide the polymeric ribbon material 230 with a matte or textured finish 239 simulating the appearance of cloth. The modification of the polymeric film 232 to provide the polymeric ribbon material 230 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the polymeric ribbon material 230 having the matte or textured finish 239 can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one of the upper surface 234 or the lower surface 236 of the polymeric film 232 with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by flocking the polymeric film 232, by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable ink to the polymeric film 232, by embossing the polymeric film 232 to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by embossing and printing the polymeric film 232 to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish 239 capable of providing the polymeric film 232 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill

roll. Thereafter, polymeric film 232 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be cut in a conventional manner to provide the polymeric ribbon material 230 having a cloth-appearing textured or matte finish.

[0101] Any polymeric film capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the polymeric material with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be employed in the formulation of the polymeric ribbon material 230. For example, the polymeric film 232 employed to produce the polymeric ribbon material 230 can be polypropylene film having a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably in a range of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness in a range of from about 0.6 mil to about 10 mil.

[0102] Embodiments of Figs. 21-22B

[0103] Referring now to Fig. 21, designated generally by the reference numeral 240 is a system for producing decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth in accordance with the present invention. That is, at least one surface of a sheet or web of polymeric material is modified with a matte or textured finish 246 to provide a web of polymeric material 244 having an appearance and/or

texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth (i.e. assimilates cloth in appearance) as hereinbefore described. Thus, the decorative grass 242 produced from the web of polymeric material 244 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth will also have a matte or textured finish 246 (Figs. 22A) which provides the decorative grass 242 with appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0104] Any polymeric material capable of being textured or otherwise modified to provide the web of polymeric material 244 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be employed to produce the decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth including the sheet of polymeric material 10 (Fig. 1), the sheet of flexible material 112 (Fig. 9A), or the sheet of flexible laminated material 112a (Fig. 9B). For example, the polymeric material employed to produce the web of polymeric material 244 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be polypropylene film having a thickness in a range of from about 0.1 mil to about 30 mil, and more desirably of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or an expanded core polymeric film having a thickness of from about 0.5 mil to about 10 mil, or laminates having a thickness of from about 1 mil to about 20 mil. The laminates which can be used to produce the web of polymeric material 244 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the

appearance and/or texture of cloth can be formed by laminating two or more webs of polymeric film (such as two or more webs of polypropylene film or a web of polypropylene film and a web of expanded core polymeric film, such as expanded core polypropylene film), or by laminating a polymeric film (such as polypropylene film or an expanded core polymeric film such as expanded core polypropylene film) with paper, metallized foil and the like. The only requirement in using a laminate to produce the web of polymeric material 244 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth is that at least one surface of the laminate be capable of being modified to provide the laminate with at least one surface having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

[0105] The modification of the web of polymeric material 244 to provide the matte or textured finish can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the web of polymeric material 244 having the matte or textured finish which provides the web of polymeric material 244 with the appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be produced by printing a web of polymeric material with a matted (i.e. dull finish) ink, by lacquering at least one surface of the web of polymeric material with a dull finish lacquer or a matting lacquer, by embossing the web of polymeric material to provide an embossed pattern simulating the weave or texture of cloth, or by flocking the web of polymeric material, or by application of a foamable lacquer or foamable

ink to the web of polymeric material, or by embossing and printing the web of polymeric material to provide embossed and printed patterns wherein the embossed and printed patterns may be in registry, out of registry or wherein a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are in registry and a portion of the embossed and printed patterns are out of registry. In addition, a matte or textured finish capable of providing the web of polymeric material 244 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be achieved by extruding a polymeric resin onto a matted or textured chill roll.

[0106] Referring again to Fig. 21, a roll 248 of the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 is supported on a mandrel 250 having a brake assembly 252 operably connected thereto so that the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 can be controllably withdrawn from the roll 248. The web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 is passed through a pair of tension or nip rollers 254 and 256 and into a slitter or shredder unit 258 where the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 is slit to provide a slit web of polymeric material 260 having a plurality of strips of predetermined width. The slitting of the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 to produce the slit web of polymeric material 244 having a plurality of strips of predetermined width can be accomplished using

any well known method and device. Such common methods of slitting the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 include: (a) slitting the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246 to produce side-by-side strips of material wherein the longer dimension of the strips is in the direction of travel of the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish 246, i.e. the machine direction; or (b) slitting the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish so that the longer dimension of the strips of material are oblique to the direction of travel of the web of polymeric material 244 having a matte or textured finish, i.e. obliquely to the machine direction.

[0107] The slit web of polymeric material 260 having a plurality of strips of predetermined width is then passed through a cutting unit 262 where the strips of the slit web of polymeric material 260 are cut into segments to form the decorative grass 242 having at least one surface with a matted or textured finish 246 which provides the decorative grass 242 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. A segment 264 of the decorative grass 242 having at least one matted or textured surface 246 which provides the decorative grass 242 with an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth is illustrated in Fig. 22A.

[0108] Any conventional device and method can be employed as the slitter or shredder unit 258 for slitting of the web of polymeric material 244 to produce

the slit web of polymeric material 260 having a plurality of strips of predetermined width and as the cutting unit 262 for cutting the strips of the slit web of polymeric material 260 to form the decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth.

Examples of conventional devices which can be used as the slitter or shredder unit 258 and/or as the cutting unit 262 are rotary knives, reciprocating knives, die cutting, laser cutting, water jet cutting, air jet cutting and the like.

[0109] The decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth produced by cutting the strips of the slit web of polymeric material 260 can then be conveyed to a storage area (not shown) which may be in the form of a suitable bin, or the decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be conveyed to a packaging machine, or conveyed to a baling machine for baling prior to storage. As other alternatives, the decorative grass 242 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth may be placed into boxes or cartons, subjected to further processing immediately or held for subsequent processing.

[0110] Referring now to Fig. 22B, designated generally by the reference numeral 266, is a segment of a decorative grass 268 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth produced from the flexible sheet of laminated material 112a having an appearance and/or

texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth hereinbefore described with reference to Fig. 9B, except that both the upper and lower surfaces of the laminated material 112a is provided with a matted or textured finish so that the decorative grass 268 is also provided with a matte or textured finish 270 on an upper and lower surface 272 and 274, respectively, of the segments of the decorative grass 268, such as the segment 266 illustrated in Fig. 22B. However, it should be understood that the decorative grass 268 having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be produced from any laminated material where at least one surface of the laminated material can be modified, such as by matting or texturing, to provide the laminated material with an appearance simulating cloth.

[0111] The decorative grasses having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth prepared in accordance with the present invention, such as the decorative grass 242 (Fig. 22A) and the decorative grass 268 (Fig. 22B) can also be provided with various types of curl configurations, can be crimped or otherwise modified. That is, in addition to providing the webs of material from which the decorative grasses are produced with a matted or textured surface which assimilates cloth, various types of curls, crimps and combinations thereof can be imparted to the webs of material prior to slitting the webs of material to produce slit webs of material, or to the

slit web of material prior to cutting the slit webs of material to produce the decorative grasses having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth. Any method or apparatus capable of imparting the desired curl and/or crimp to the webs of material so that the decorative grasses produced from such webs of material possess both a curl and/or crimped configuration and an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth can be employed to impart a curl and/or crimp to the webs of material. Examples of various methods and apparatus which may be used to impart curl configurations to the webs of material employed to produce decorative grasses having an appearance and/or texture simulating the appearance and/or texture of cloth are described in co-pending U.S. patent application U.S. Serial No 08/879,242, entitled "Method and Apparatus For Making Curled Decorative Grass" which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference. Crimping machines capable of imparting the desired crimp to the webs of material so that the decorative grasses produced from such webs of material possess a crimped configuration, as well as having a paper-like appearance are well known and commercially available. One method for imparting a crimp configuration to the webs of material so that the decorative grasses produced from such webs of material possess a crimped configuration, as well as having a paper-like appearance, is disclosed in co-pending U.S. patent application U.S. Serial No 08/796,182, entitled "Method Of

Forming Curled Or Crimped Decorative Elements Having An Optical Effect" which is hereby expressly incorporated herein by reference.

[0112] Changes may be made in the construction and the operation of the various components, elements and assemblies described herein or in the steps or the sequence of steps of the methods described herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.